



**State of the County Address
Waukesha County Executive Dan Vrakas
Monday, April 23, 2007**

Thank you for attending my Installation Ceremony and State of the County Address. I appreciate the fact that so many of you took time out of your busy schedules to attend this special event, which marks the beginning of my first 4-year term as your County Executive. At this time, I would like to recognize the elected officials in the audience.

Since taking office on October 31, 2005, I have had an opportunity to dive head first into County government so that I could fully understand the scope of services that we provide here in Waukesha County. I have been impressed with the exceptional relationship between the Executive

and Legislative branches of our government, which makes it possible to implement sound policies and innovative government practices. I would like to thank our County Board Supervisors for their continued commitment to this partnership, which enables us to do many things that other government agencies only dream about. I would like to thank Chairman Jim Dwyer and the County Board of Supervisors for their leadership. For the first time, I invited County Board Committee Chairs to participate early on in the budget process by including them in department budget briefings. I plan to invite them again this year into the Executive office. Their vote to downsize from 35 members to 25 members was difficult, yet courageous, and the right thing to do. I would also like to thank all the dedicated County staff members that work diligently day-in-and-day-out to serve our residents and their growing needs.

I am proud to tell you today that Waukesha County is in excellent fiscal health. As we go through each budget cycle, our overriding goal is to balance the County's spending needs with the people's ability to pay. In doing

so, we ask for and incorporate citizen and stakeholder involvement; we tie our budget process to our strategic planning efforts; we base decisions on measurable objectives; and, we protect our Aaa/AAA bond rating at all cost. Last week I was notified that our county has once again earned our AAA bond Rating, and just this morning our bonds were sold at a very attractive rate. We are one of less than 50 County government agencies out of more than 3,000 across the county to maintain this coveted status, which is reflective of our exceptional financial management and enables us to lower our borrowing costs. Most importantly our bond rating is a symbol of excellence, which I believe exemplifies the high standard of service that the county strives to achieve in all departments.

When I first campaigned for this office, I pledged to provide quality services and hold the line on taxes by working to make government more efficient. Last year my administration made many critical decisions to provide the taxpayers of Waukesha County with just that. Through responsible budgeting the taxpayers of Waukesha County

benefited from the most significant tax decrease in recent history.

As many of you know, there are always a few items that drive every budget, but here at Waukesha County, we work hard to identify ways to manage them successfully so that we can keep our taxes low. For example, although healthcare costs for our personnel continue to rise, we've been able to keep that increase below the national average by instituting co-pays, deductibles, wellness programs, offering a HSA to employees and implementing preventative care strategies. And, just like our homeowners and businesses, Waukesha County will realize significant energy cost increases over the next year. Currently, we expect a 9.5% increase in electricity, a 14.5% increase in natural gas, and a 16% vehicle fuel increase. To help save on our electric bill, the County's Public Works Department has replaced incandescent light bulbs at traffic signals with Light Emitting Diodes or LED's. This change alone is estimated to save us \$20,000 in 2007. And, to help control our energy costs in the future, I'm calling for a

Sustainability Initiative to examine our current operations and recommend environmentally-friendly business practices that are also cost-effective. I have formed a committee comprised of county staff that has been charged with working together collaboratively to develop a roadmap for a more “green” County government.

My administration has made justice and public safety the County’s top priority. We have had to make a number of tough decisions to accomplish this important goal, and ultimately we cut administration by merging our Risk Management and Purchasing Divisions in order to fund additional positions at the dispatch center. Currently over 80% of our E911 calls originate from cell phones. Technology has changed the landscape and my administration is reprioritizing to meet the counties changing needs.

Our consolidated dispatch center, which operates in partnership with 29 communities and fire districts, is an excellent example of how government agencies can work

together to provide our residents with better service. In addition to providing state-of-the-art emergency medical dispatch, in the past year we've, through GPS technology, helped the Tess Corners Fire Department rescue a stranded couple on Big Muskego Lake. In addition our dispatchers helped deliver healthy babies in Pewaukee and Big Bend.

Their parents and I are not the only ones who think our Communication center partnership is working exceptionally well. Big Bend Vernon Fire Department Chief Phil Buccholtz, the head of one of the responding EMS service agencies, said the following about their experience, and I quote,

“The delivery of the Fritz Baby is a great example of how our fire department is able to provide the best possible emergency service to our communities through the consolidated Waukesha County dispatch center. Dispatcher Crull did an excellent job in providing detailed pre-arrival instructions to the Fritz family, contributed greatly to the successful outcome

of this event, and was extremely helpful to our emergency personnel upon their arrival at the scene only minutes after the call was received.” Thank you Chief Buccholtz and to all the law enforcement officials in the county that have helped make WCC a success.

The dispatch center is one of many shining examples of government collaboration that Waukesha County has instituted, and I believe that these partnerships are some of the best ways to improve service quality while reducing our operational costs.

You might have heard about a new program that the Department of Administration’s Human Resources Division launched last year to expand employee training opportunities to our municipalities. The initiative, called Partners in Training, has been received with huge success. The program, maximizes the County’s training resources, lowers municipal training costs, and provides staff with quality skill development opportunities, which is a great

way to leverage our tax dollars. I firmly believe that our investment in employee education is a benefit to the individual and the organization as a whole because it increases worker productivity, retention, and morale.

Another area where inter-governmental cooperation has had great success is recycling. Currently, we partner with 25 municipalities to process recyclables at our Materials Recycling Facility. This year, it pleases me to announce that our partners will receive a total of \$725,000 in rebate checks from the County for participating in the program, which is up \$75,000 from last year. The increase is a result of efficient program operations, higher market values for recycled materials, and continued state grant funding. The MRF, which is operated without tax levy dollars, is truly a great way for us to leverage our resources. And, our work with our municipal partners doesn't stop there.

Through the Department of Parks and Land Use's Land Information Division, the County has offered to assist all of

its 37 municipalities in completing a vital update of local addresses for the U.S. Census Bureau. According to the federal agency, all communities over 6,000 in population are required edit their information in the Census Master Address File. With the Land Information Division's GIS technology, which includes a countywide address database with Census areas, municipalities will be able to satisfy the Bureau's requirements in a computer-readable format for this vital review.

Another municipal partnership that I am proud to mention is the County's partnership with the Cities of New Berlin and Waukesha to construct a fenced-in dog park in Minooka Park.

We're also working with our surrounding counties on a number of initiatives. We're sharing Medical Examiner services with Racine and Washington Counties, an Emergency Management Director with Ozaukee County and an Agriculture Agent with Jefferson County. We are also in the process of working with Milwaukee County to

secure equipment that would enable us to provide back-up services for each other's dispatch centers.

Our own Public Health Division also does an excellent job at leveraging its resources through the Milwaukee/Waukesha County Consortium for Emergency Public Health Preparedness. It was recently recognized as one of seven agencies across the country for being ready to handle large-scale public health emergencies by the National Association of County and City Health Officials. This consortium ensures that public health practitioners are working together prior to an outbreak, which is important because public health emergencies do not stop at our county lines.

Last month, the Department of Senior Services, in partnership with Meda-Care Vans of Waukesha, started a pilot program to provide specialized transportation users with an opportunity to make reservations for rides on Friday nights and Saturday mornings. This expanded service will provide door-to-door non-medical

transportation assistance to our seniors aged 65 and older and to disabled residents. Ultimately, it will give riders even greater access to weekend activities and an improved quality of life.

Just last week, our nation celebrated National Volunteer Week. This special time provides communities and organizations across the country with an opportunity to thank their most valuable assets...Volunteers. And, I want you to know that Waukesha County government could not exist as it does today without its volunteers. Let me give you an example. The Department of Senior Services does an excellent job at holding the line on spending through its extensive volunteer network. On an annual basis more than 1,700 individuals and groups give more than 36,000 hours to help the department deliver important services to seniors. The result of this invaluable volunteer assistance is a true cost savings in excess of \$315,000. I would be remiss if I did not mention that one of the departments very own senior dining volunteers, Alma Perry, was recently recognized by the Volunteer Center and received the

agency's annual Director's Award for her years of committed community service. At 90 years of age, she is what makes this community such a wonderful place to live, work, raise a family and retire.

In addition to recognizing Alma, I do want to take this opportunity to recognize Betsy Crosswaite, our very own Department of Public Works employee. Recently, Betsy was given the Citizen of the Year Award by the Waukesha Freeman for her numerous volunteer commitments and her drive to make the Waukesha area a better place to live. In addition to all of her work in the community, she is also a wonderful asset to our organization. Thank you Betsy for all that you do! You are a shining example of volunteerism, and I hope that you inspire others to follow in your footsteps.

As you can see, this is a great time for Waukesha County. Thank you for re-electing me to serve as your County Executive. I am truly humbled by this opportunity

and I appreciate the fact that so many of you came here to share in this special day with me.